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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 003636

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT. EUR/WE (MENNUTI)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PREL PREL VT VTPGOV

SUBJECT: THE LIMITS OF VATICAN PERSUASION ON BISHOPS' POLITICAL VIEWS

REF: 2001 VATICAN 0196

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: DESPITE THE PERCEPTION OF THE HOLY SEE AS A HIERARCHICAL ORGANIZATION, IT RARELY GIVES "MARCHING ORDERS" TO CATHOLIC BISHOPS ON SECULAR POLITICAL MATTERS. IN THE RARE CASES WHEN IT DOES DECIDE TO PRESS ITS POLITICAL VIEWS, IT IS LARGELY LIMITED TO THE POWER OF PAPAL PERSUASION - WHICH IS COMPELLING, BUT NOT ALWAYS ENOUGH TO UNCLASSIFIED

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CHANGE BISHOPS' INDIVIDUAL CONVICTIONS. THE POPE'S VIEWS ON POLITICAL MATTERS ARE CONVEYED BY THE SECRETARIAT OF STATE THROUGH THE LOCAL NUNCIO. HOWEVER, THE HOLY SEE GENERALLY SEEKS TO AVOID PUBLIC DISPUTES, BOTH TO PRESERVE THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH AND TO PROTECT THE PHYSICAL SECURITY OF ITS ADHERENTS IN COUNTRIES WHERE CATHOLICS ARE A THREATENED MINORITY. WHEN LOCAL BISHOPS' VIEWS RUN COUNTER TO U.S. INTERESTS, DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE RESIDENT NUNCIO AND THE BISHOPS THEMSELVES OFFER THE BEST MEANS TO ADDRESS ISSUES. EMBASSY VATICAN WOULD ALSO BE PREPARED TO RAISE ISSUES OF PRIORITY INTEREST WITH THE SECRETARIAT OF STATE. END SUMMARY.

BISHOPS AND POLITICS

¶2. (SBU) EMBASSY VATICAN OCCASIONALLY RECEIVES QUERIES FROM POSTS AS TO WHETHER THE HOLY SEE MIGHT INTERVENE TO CHANGE THE POLITICAL BEHAVIOR OF A BISHOP. RECENT INQUIRIES, FOR EXAMPLE, HAVE FOCUSED ON HARD LINE CROAT-NATIONALIST CLERGY IN CROATIA AND BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA AND BISHOPS' LETTERS SEEING TO SUPPORT BASQUE SEPARATISM. IN THE PAST, BISHOPS' SUPPORT FOR LIBERATION THEOLOGY IN CENTRAL AMERICA OR REPRESSIVE REGIMES IN THE SOUTHERN CONE OF LATIN AMERICA HAVE EVOKED CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC DISCUSSION AND CRITICISM. UNLIKE OTHER GOVERNMENTS WE MIGHT APPROACH TO REIN IN AN OFFICIAL, THE HOLY SEE IS CONSTRAINED ON POLITICAL ISSUES (UNLIKE ISSUES OF CHURCH DOCTRINE) BY CHURCH STRUCTURES AND TRADITIONS FROM COMPELLING ADHERENCE TO VIEWS FAVORED BY THE CURIA.

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THE LIMITS TO PAPAL PERSUASION

¶3. (U) THE HOLY SEE HAS LIMITED OPTIONS FOR INFLUENCING LOCAL BISHOPS' POLITICAL VIEWS. USUALLY IT RELIES ON THE POWER OF PERSUASION VIA THE LOCAL NUNCIO. A BISHOP IS BROADLY AUTONOMOUS IN HIS DIOCESE, HOWEVER, AS THE CATHOLIC CHURCH FOLLOWS THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY -- THE REQUIREMENT THAT LOCAL ELEMENTS OF THE CHURCH MANAGE THEIR OWN AFFAIRS. THE HOLY SEE MAY INVOKE THE FEALTY OF A BISHOP TO HIS POPE, BUT IT HAS LIMITED DISCIPLINARY RECOURSE IN THE EVENT THE BISHOP REFUSES TO ALTER OR TONE DOWN HIS VIEWS. WERE THE POPE TO ATTEMPT TO REPLACE OR RECALL THE BISHOP ON THE BASIS OF POLITICAL VIEWS AGAINST THE WILL OF HIS FLOCK, HE WOULD RISK PROVOKING A SCHISM, WITH NO GUARANTEE THAT THE POPE'S VIEWS WOULD PREVAIL. THE VATICAN SEEKS TO AVOID SUCH AN INJURY TO THE "FAMILY" OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH AT ALMOST ANY COST.

¶4. (SBU) IN RECENT HISTORY, THE POPE HAS EXCOMMUNICATED A BISHOP ONLY FOR DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCES, NOT POLITICAL ONES. FOR EXAMPLE, IN 1988 ULTRA-CONSERVATIVE FRENCH PRELATE, MARCEL LEFEBVRE WAS EXCOMMUNICATED "AUTOMATICALLY" FOR ORDAINING NEW BISHOPS FOR HIS BREAK-AWAY GROUP OF CATHOLICS WITHOUT THE REQUIRED PERMISSION OF THE POPE. ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE WAS THE BREAKUP OF THE SAO PAOLO DIOCESE IN 1989 INTO FOUR SEPARATE DIOCESES. THE POPE AND HIS CURIA UNILATERALLY DECLARED THE BREAKUP AND INSTALLATION OF THREE ADDITIONAL (AND MORE CONSERVATIVE) UNCLASSIFIED

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BISHOPS WHEN ARCHBISHOP OF SAO PAOLO EVARISTO ARNS REFUSED TO BACK DOWN FROM HIS STRONG SUPPORT FOR LIBERATION

THEOLOGY.

15. (SBU) MORE FREQUENTLY, THE VATICAN HAS HAD LIMITED ABILITY IN CHANGING POLITICAL POSITIONS OF ITS BISHOPS. IN 2001, FOR EXAMPLE, THE CROATIAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE'S PUBLIC CRITICISM OF THE DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED AND REFORM-ORIENTED GOVERNMENT OF STIPE MESIC, PRESENTED A THREAT TO THE VATICAN'S BROADER INTEREST IN REGIONAL RECONCILIATION AND STABILITY. THE NUNCIO IN ZAGREB WAS CHARGED WITH CONVEYING THE HOLY SEE'S "CEASE AND DESIST" ORDER TO THE CROATIAN BISHOPS. WHEN THAT DIDN'T CHANGE THE LATTER'S ANTI-GOVERNMENT COMMENTARY, THE SECRETARIAT OF STATE DISPATCHED FM EQUIVALENT ARCHBISHOP TAURAN TO ZAGREB TO PRESS THE POINT. TAURAN LEFT A PRO MEMORIA WITH THE CROATIAN BISHOPS -- AN ESPECIALLY STRONG INDICATION OF THE HOLY SEE'S INTEREST IN THE ISSUE (REFTEL). THE POPE, HOWEVER, DID NOT PUBLICLY CENSURE THE LOCAL BISHOPS. THAT HE DIDN'T UNDERSCORES THE PRIMARY INTEREST IN PROTECTING THE OUTWARD

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO LOG-00 NP-00 AMAD-00 ACQ-00 CIAE-00 INL-00 DODE-00
DS-00 UTED-00 VC-00 TEDE-00 INR-00 IO-00 LAB-01
VCE-00 NSAE-00 TEST-00 DSCC-00 DRL-02 SAS-00 /003W
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UNITY OF THE CHURCH AND THE SECURITY OF THE FAITHFUL IN THOSE COUNTRIES WHERE CATHOLICS ARE A MINORITY (IN THIS CASE, IN NEIGHBORING BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA).

16. (SBU) COMMENT: WHEN CONFRONTED WITH A BISHOP WHOSE VIEWS GO AGAINST THE GRAIN OF THE HOLY SEE'S VIEWS ON SECULAR POLITICAL ISSUES, THE HOLY SEE WILL ALWAYS ASSESS ITS OWN BIG PICTURE OF FAITH, MORALS, DOCTRINE AND THE WELL-BEING OF UNCLASSIFIED

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ITS FAITHFUL IN JUDGING WHETHER AND HOW TO INTERVENE. THE HOLY SEE WILL ALMOST ALWAYS CHOOSE TO ACT BEHIND THE SCENES, APPROACHING AN OUTSPOKEN BISHOP THROUGH HIS COLLEAGUES IN THE LOCAL BISHOPS' CONFERENCE AND/OR THE LOCAL NUNCIO. IN CASES WHERE BISHOPS OF OTHER CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES ARTICULATE VIEWS SEEN AS DAMAGING TO U.S. INTERESTS, EMBASSIES SHOULD SEEK TO DEVELOP GOOD AVENUES OF COMMUNICATION WITH THE RESIDENT NUNCIO AND THE NATIONAL BISHOPS THEMSELVES. EMBASSY VATICAN WOULD ALSO BE PREPARED TO APPROACH THE SECRETARIAT OF STATE AT THE HOLY SEE AND TO ADVISE POSTS ON HOW BEST TO ADVANCE U.S. VIEWS IN THE FACE OF OUTSPOKEN OPPOSITION FROM LOCAL BISHOPS.

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